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Jim Brown - January 10, 2013

Montana Wool Growers Association

Grizzlies/Livestock

In June of 2012, a female grizzly bear killed more than 70 sheep in north central Montana during a two week period. The kills occurred at three separate ranches, all located within 40 miles of Great Falls.

The kills did not occur on ranches located proximate to a national forest, nor did they occur on a remote federal grazing allotment. Rather, the kills occurred on the open plains – in an area where grizzlies had not been seen in years.

This incident highlights the growing management challenge grizzlies are presenting to federal and state wildlife managers, and to Montana's agriculture industry.

On the one hand, the fact that grizzly bears are being found in greater and greater numbers on the plains is a testament to the concerted effort to bring the grizzly bear population in Montana back from the brink of extinction. Grizzly bears in Montana have been managed under the auspices of the Federal Endangered Species Act since 1975. As a result, and as a result of a population growth rate of roughly three percent, the federal government has determined that the grizzly bear population around Yellowstone Park and in other areas of Montana is recovered, and that management of the species can be turned over to the State of Montana. Unfortunately, lawsuits by so-called environmental groups have prevented those delisting efforts from occurring – though the writing is on the wall and delisting will eventually occur.

While all Montanans can celebrate the success of the grizzly bear recovery efforts, there is a reality that comes along with grizzly bear population growth.

These realities are as follows

First, Montana's wildlife managers and officials need to be immediately prepared to manage the species once the primary responsibility for the population is turned over from the federal government to the State.

Second, as exemplified by the large sheep kill referenced earlier, the number of conflicts between humans and livestock and grizzly bears is sure to increase – a reality that will require policy makers and wildlife management personnel to make difficult, but informed choices as to how best to protect bears, humans, and livestock.

The discussion has already begun about reinstituting a grizzly bear hunt in Montana as one tool to manage the growth of the grizzly bear population. The hunt seems to be a popular idea. However, hunting grizzly bears should not be seen as the end-all, be-all tool for managing the species once they are delisted. Rather, like Montana's gray wolf management plan, Montana needs to implement and to carry out a comprehensive management plan for grizzlies. Further, Montana needs to have a clearly identified source of funds that can be used for grizzly bear management purposes, and for the purpose of compensating livestock owners for losses due to grizzly bear attacks.

At present, because the grizzly bear is treated as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, livestock owners are not compensated by either the federal or the State of Montana for losses that occur as a result of grizzly kills.

It is easy for the listener of this program to imagine the devastating emotional loss experienced by the ranchers who had their sheep killed during last June's grizzly rampage. What may be hard for the listener to image is the real amount of economic loss suffered by those ranchers. Death loss is only a small portion of the actual economic injury to ranchers. Economic loss is also caused by stress on livestock due



to the presence of bears, which results in reduced weight gain, lower pregnancy rates and higher veterinary bills for stock that are injured by a bear attack. When all losses are factored in, the losses in Montana alone amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars due to grizzly and wolf predation. Again, unlike the current compensation provided by the State of Montana for depredations on livestock by wolves, ranchers who have livestock killed by grizzlies do not get compensated for those kills by the state or federal government. Those losses result in money being directly taken out of their pocket.

In December, the Montana Wool Growers Association gathered together in Billings to hold their annual convention. At that convention, the members of Montana's sheep industry discussed extensively the present and future problems associated with Montana's growing grizzly bear population. Concerns were raised that neither federal nor state wildlife managers had adequate plans in place to ensure proper management of the species once they are delisted. Further, concerns were raised about where the funding will come from once management is turned over to Montana. The Woolgrowers saw the need to be proactive, rather than reactive, on this issue.

To address these concerns, Montana's sheep producers will be seeking to pass two bills through the 2013 Montana Legislature to address these pressing issues.

If enacted, the first bill will authorize Montana's Livestock Loss Board to compensate Montanans for livestock losses that occur as a result of grizzly bear kills. At present, state law allows the Livestock Loss Board to compensate livestock owners for verified wolf depredations. That's good policy as it recognizes that livestock producers should not have to bear the financial burden of the decision made to reintroduce wolves into Montana.

And so should it be with grizzly bears. While Montana's ranching and farming community supports efforts to get grizzly bears off of the endangered species list, it is widely recognized that agriculture cannot be expected to assume the true cost associated with the growth in grizzly bear numbers. If passed, this common sense bill simply recognizes this reality by extending the livestock loss's board's authority to mitigate damage done to livestock producers by another large predator species, the grizzly bear, while, at the same time redressing a huge hole in grizzly bear management by providing a clearly identified source of funding for this purpose.

The second bill addresses the other missing piece of grizzly bear management – the need to prevent livestock grizzly bear conflicts in the first instance. Everyone can agree that the best grizzly bear management practices are those that prevent bears from getting into trouble with either livestock or humans. In the past, Montana's sheep industry has worked to institute pro-active programs to prevent wolf-livestock conflicts. Such programs include putting up fencing, employing livestock protection dogs and noise makers, and using proper carcass removal methods in order to keep bears away from sheep. These programs are not always successful, but they are helpful in reducing losses.

Based on past experience, these types of prevention programs, if adequately funded, could prove even more effective when applied to grizzly bears. This is because grizzly bears can be more easily dissuaded than wolves from preying on livestock by human measures.

Again, the problem with implementing these non-lethal preventative measures is that very little to no funding is available for this purpose. To meet this funding need, a bill will be introduced to provide for \$600,000 in state funding to the Livestock Loss Board. That money would then be allocated out to ranchers, associations, and wildlife managers to implement steps designed to reduce, minimize, and curtail conflicts between bears and humans and bears and domestic animals – a win-win scenario.

Like a majority of Montanans, Montana's sheep and wool producers understand that wildlife plays an important and enriching role in our lives. And that is why the MWGA's membership has taken an active role in working with both state and federal wildlife officials on grizzly bear management plans and policies. However, because ranches and farms are increasingly becoming grizzly habit as grizzly numbers grow, and knowing the economic devastation that can be done to their operations by predator kills such as the one mentioned in the lead of this editorial, the sheep industry will continue to be active in pushing state and federal officials to support and fund programs that are vital to the economic survival of Montana's top economic industry—the livestock industry.

The sheep industry supports the legislative proposals discussed to authorize the state to pay livestock producers for losses incurred as the result of grizzly bear kills and to provide funding for grizzly conflict reduction efforts. If implemented, these programs will help to speed up the recovery of Montana's grizzly bear population, will allow for grizzly bears to expand their range while lessening the risk of grizzly conflicts,, and will help the state keep its promise to the livestock industry to mitigate damage caused by growing predator populations. The sheep industry asks for your, the listener's, support for those programs as well.

Jim Brown is the Public Relations Director for the Montana Wool Growers Association, which represents Montana's sheep and wool products. The Wool Growers Association is the oldest agriculture association in Montana.

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Excerpt from Montana Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Western Montana.

Submitted by Jim Brown

Montana Wool Growers

In support of HB 322

Livestock Conflicts

Livestock operations that maintain large blocks of open rangeland can provide many benefits to the longterm

conservation of grizzly bears, not the least of which is the maintenance of open space and habitats that support a wide variety of wildlife, including grizzlies. At the same time, livestock operators can suffer losses from bear depredation. These losses tend to be directed at sheep and young cattle. In addition, honeybees are classified as livestock in Montana, and bears can damage apiaries. Our ability to deal with such issues will, in large part, determine the overall success of our grizzly management efforts. Correspondingly, FWP's preferred approaches to managing livestock conflict in western Montana include:

- ☐ Management efforts will be directed at depredating animals.
- ☐ Wildlife Services (WS) will be the lead agency dealing with livestock depredation (see MOU Appendices D and E) and as recovery and eventual delisting occurs, we will seek to provide them with additional flexibility and ability to make day-to-day management decisions regarding resolving livestock conflicts.
- ☐ FWP will respond to conflicts in cooperation with WS. Ultimately, with successful recovery and delisting, WS will be the appropriate agency to handle livestock conflicts and will report their activities annually, as already occurs with black bears and other predators.
- ☐ FWP, in cooperation with WS and other agencies, will focus on preventive programs aimed at minimizing livestock conflict with priority toward those areas with a history of conflict or currently occupied by bears.

- ☐ FWP will review and adjust the guidelines for dealing with damage to beehives (Appendix E).
- ☐ FWP will work with beekeepers to provide electric fences for all apiaries accessible to bears, and FWP will re-evaluate the guidelines for bear depredation to beehives and modify if needed.
- ☐ FWP will encourage private programs and funding for compensation of livestock loss.
- ☐ FWP will review the carcass redistribution program and make changes if indicated by that review.
- ☐ FWP will work with the livestock industry to evaluate the possibility of an insurance program for predator losses.

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☐ Currently sheep and/or goats are being used for weed control. FWP will work with operators to ensure conflicts with bears are minimal through the use of herders, electric fences, dogs, or other tools as appropriate. There may be places where these programs may be inappropriate due to conflicts with bears, and FWP will recommend the use of "non-livestock" approaches to weed control in those areas.

Although livestock and bears share many landscapes in Montana, conflicts with livestock result in few bear mortalities. Currently, WS handles issues of livestock depredation, and FWP anticipates this will continue. FWP envisions the establishment of proactive collaborative working agreements with WS that focus future programs and efforts on conflict prevention where possible.

The agency envisions programs where landowners can contact FWP's grizzly bear management specialists for assistance with assessments of risks from bears and possible preventative approaches to minimize those risks. FWP will work to provide landowners, livestock growers and beekeepers with the appropriate tools (e.g. electric fencing, aversive conditioning, guard dogs) to minimize conflicts. In addition, FWP will work with federal and tribal authorities, NGOs and beekeepers to identify sources of funding to develop programs that provide private livestock operations with additional benefits (such as priority for easements or access to other FWP programs) if they implement preventive approaches and maintain opportunities for wildlife, including bears, on their private lands and their public-land

allotments. Working with other agencies and interests, the possibility of transferring grazing leases from areas of high conflicts to other areas with willing landowners/operators is another option. In this way, the program and its benefits are focused on operators who make an effort to address concerns and issues

that result from the presence of grizzlies.

As a long-term goal FWP will also seek to enclose all bee yards in areas accessible to bears with electric fencing. Electric fencing is very effective at deterring both black and grizzly bears, and use of this technique can significantly reduce problems and the need to remove bears. FWP will work with the livestock industry to identify sources of funding to accomplish this. The Natural Resources Conservation Service recently implemented a new grant program to fund electric fencing in the Blackfoot Valley. They also established a standardized all-species electric fence design for fencing projects. Additional efforts will be made to identify possible funding that could be used to support staff whose sole responsibility would be to develop/implement preventative programs. These personnel should also be available to any livestock operation when requested to assess potential depredation risks and identify possible solutions prior to any depredations.

Devices to protect apiaries, corralled livestock, chicken and turkey coops, and stored feeds may be provided by FWP to property owners for protection of agricultural products. Protective supplies include electric fencing, bear resistant containers, audible and visual deterrent devices, and aversive conditioning

devices. FWP may form partnerships with WS, livestock operators, NGOs and land management agencies to promote livestock management techniques that reduce bear depredations. For example, some

people request that dead livestock be removed from grizzly bear areas and there are programs available to do this in parts of western Montana. While there may be times this is appropriate, there are cases within the State where livestock that died due to poisonous plants, lightning, or other causes can provide food for bears in areas away from potential conflict sites. Recognizing this, FWP has a program to redistribute livestock carcasses on the Rocky Mountain Front and the Blackfoot Valley so they remain

available to bears but in areas that minimize the potential for conflict. Assisting livestock operators, and removing carcasses from areas around buildings or calving/lambing areas can minimize potential conflicts with bears. These types of programs will be evaluated for use within the other portions of

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western Montana and to ensure they are functioning as desired. Conflict management will emphasize long-term, non-lethal solutions, but relocating or removing offending animals will be necessary to resolve

some problems. FWP will continue to promote the development of new techniques and devices that can be used to protect agricultural products from bear damage.

At the present time, private conservation groups in Montana assist in developing preventative approaches, and FWP will cooperate with them to address this issue. Defenders of Wildlife has already cost shared the purchase of electric fence to protect sheep and bee yards through their Proactive Carnivore Conservation Fund. The National Wildlife Federation has a program to retire public land grazing allotments in areas with high conflict between livestock and wildlife from willing sellers; to date over 300,000 acres in the Yellowstone area have been retired by the Federation and other cooperators. Such cost share or cooperative programs will be a component of any long-term solutions to these issues. In any discussion of livestock damage, an issue that is frequently raised concerns offering compensation to livestock operators for their losses to bears. While FWP encourages private groups (notably Defenders

of Wildlife through the Bailey Wildlife Foundation Proactive Carnivore Conservation Fund) to continue compensating operators, the agency prefers to take the approach of providing management flexibility to landowners as a long-term solution to preventing livestock conflicts and depredation. Providing operators the opportunity to develop proactive problem solving plans to respond to potential conflicts before they develop can build support for the long-term program of increasing bear numbers and distribution. Moreover, compensation relies on verification that may not be easily accomplished in Montana's multi-predator environment. It also requires assessment of value, which can vary greatly

between individual animals (for example, not every cow has the same value), and it requires ongoing funding sources. Fundamentally, however, it deals with a problem after it has occurred.

If Montana can implement a program that affords landowners management flexibility within reason to prevent livestock-grizzly conflicts and with some constraints (similar to black bears and mountain lions), FWP believes it will build broader public support. Groups interested in conservation of the bear will, however, need assurances that such flexibility will not jeopardize long-term survival or ongoing recovery prospects.

Property Damage

Bears can, and will on occasion, damage personal property other than livestock. For example, they may enter buildings, chew on snowmobile seats or tear down fruit trees. In fact, bears are highly attracted to almost any potential food source. Processed human food, gardens, garbage, livestock and pet feeds, livestock carcasses, and septic treatment systems are particularly attractive to bears near camps and residential areas, and are often the cause of human-bear conflicts. FWP's objective is to minimize, to the extent possible, property damage caused by grizzly bears.

☐ FWP will focus on preventive measures, including management aimed at elimination of attractants, and better sanitation measures; the agency's bear management specialists will work on these issues on both public and private lands.

☐ FWP will seek funding to continue the grizzly bear management specialist positions currently stationed in Missoula, Kalispell, and Choteau. The IGBC has also recognized the need to create additional positions in the Cabinet-Yaak and